

## The Fall 473

### Chapter 473: Twilight Harbor

Catheya looked extremely shocked at the prospect of her ancestor having married, or perhaps having remarried as she already had descendants since before.

"I didn't get his name," Zac coughed before he described his appearance.

"Our ancestor has run off with an Aetherlord? What?" Catheya mumbled as she sat down with a thump. "Well, better that than some human I guess. No offense."

Zac only snorted in response, not taking the thing to heart. It was not like he was lining up to date someone who wasn't even alive.

"Why hasn't she returned though?" Catheya asked. "Where is she now? How was her mental state?"

"I have no idea where she is," Zac said. "I saw her sitting in a dark cave with a sea of liquefied Miasma slowly rotating around her. It felt like a drop of that pond would be able to instantly kill me. She seemed normal, a bit cold I guess?"

"So why hasn't she been back for so long?" she muttered with some despondency.

"She didn't say, I saw them for less than a minute," Zac said, but he spoke up again after some hesitation. "But the path we walk has side-effects. You saw what happened to this place the other day. She might be afraid of hurting her family if she lost control."

"Madness..." Catheya muttered. "I feel like you are still keeping some secrets from me though."

"Some things aren't of any value to you, but they pertain to my cultivation path. I know that the two of them cultivate opposite Daos though, and I think they are forming some system between them. That might be why your ancestor can stay alive," Zac added after some thought, feeling he hadn't provided much information in return for the treasures.

"The also husband spoke of broken peaks and seemed to carry resentment toward the System."

"Broken peaks..." Catheya muttered. "The Boundless Path? This might be important, I need to speak with my master."

"Stuff like that is beyond me. I'm just a newly integrated Progenitor, I don't have any experience with stuff like old ancestors," Zac shrugged. "Can I ask something else?"

"What?" Catheya said, though her interest in keeping up the conversation seemed to have waned somewhat now that she had the information she wanted.

"What ways are there to gain more limited title slots?"

Catheya was someone from a higher sector than the one he lived in, which meant that things that her knowledge might be unrivaled compared to all the other scions in the Base town. She also didn't care about offending any local force like the Heliophos Clan, so he needed to milk her for as much knowledge as he could before he returned to Earth.

"Limited Titles... Just what did you encounter in the Tower of Eternity?" Catheya said, her crestfallen demeanor replaced by one filled with curiosity. "Did you encounter a trial?"

"A what?"

"A special event inside the tower. You encountered one, didn't you?" Catheya asked.

Zac hesitated for a few seconds before he slowly nodded.

"The fate you carry must be pretty immense," Catheya muttered. "Then again, that was already all too apparent from the events outside."

"Fate?"

"The amount of attention the Heavens put on you. It is both a blessing and a curse," Catheya smiled.

Zac weakly smiled in return, knowing the sentiment all too well.

"So, Limited Titles?" Zac said.

"It's extremely rare. My master is deemed to have great genius partly because he has 4 Limited Slots. There are people with more, but I don't know how they have gotten the other one. There are only a few generally known means to gain such a boost, and the Tower and its equivalent trials are the only I have heard of before D-Grade," Catheya said.

"Why is there a limit at all?" Zac muttered. "Why doesn't the System not just have normal titles? Isn't its goal to make people powerful?"

"Tell me what trial you encountered," Catheya smiled.

"It was called a Battle of Fates, it replaced the 63rd floor," Zac said after deciding if the trade of information was worth it.

"That's a rough one, but its mortality is pretty low," Catheya nodded. "It's a decent one to get, as long as you're adept at combat."

"So, titles?" Zac said.

"Did you know that cultivators today are stronger than they were pre-system?" Catheya said.

"Isn't that the point of the System?" Zac responded, not understanding where Catheya was going.

"Making warriors stronger."

"Yes, but I am talking stage by stage," Catheya explained. "The average cultivators of today are only slightly better than the average ancient cultivators, but the elites are almost twice as powerful going by the records. Can you guess why?"

"The titles?" Zac immediately understood.

"Exactly. Skills, Cultivation manuals, Bloodlines, and Daos. All this existed before the System. But titles did not," the Draugr said. "It's still not completely understood exactly what the Ruthless Heavens does when giving out titles, but the consensus is that it can be seen as an extremely exact, but minute, Bloodline Evolution. A Title improves our base constitution by a small degree."

“However, nothing comes without a price. It no doubt costs the System energy to improve the fundamental aspects of a warrior, and the Heavens is running at maximum capacity as far as we can tell, constantly integrating new realms. It can’t expend unlimited resources on every person, especially as its core directive is to manufacture warriors as efficiently as possible,” Catheya said.

“The general belief is that it’s pretty cheap for the System to award titles to warriors who are still in the earliest stages of cultivation. Giving 5% to Intelligence is barely anything. But providing 5% Intelligence for an A-Grade Prince? That would require terrifying amounts of energy,” the Draugr continued.

“But even if you get the title early, you’ll still get the same boost when reaching A-Grade later,” Zac countered.

“The Heavens won’t provide that energy. You will need to collect that yourself through killing or cultivating,” the Draugr smiled.

“So if you have a bunch of titles your cultivation will be slower?” Zac asked with surprise.

“Yes. The amount of energy a warrior requires to level up differs from person to person. A higher potential will require more energy,” Catheya explained as matter of course. “It’s not noticeable in the F-grade as the System subsidizes everyone, but elites generally gain levels slower. That’s why most factions force their general warriors to use lower Rarity Classes. They’ll shoot up to their bottlenecks far quicker, and a few might even break through with the extra time on their hands.”

“So the system provides the Titles as rewards, but you have to provide the energy required to maintain them yourself,” Zac concluded.

“Exactly,” Catheya nodded.

“And the limited titles?” Zac asked.

“The Ruthless Heavens still needed an extra incentive for people to enter dangerous places. Often people return empty-handed from such ventures, but if they at least could get a Title out of it more are likely to risk their lives. This dramatically increases the death rate among cultivators, but those who survive are stronger and more experienced,” Catheya smiled. “Besides, if you have a limited number of titles you will gradually upgrade them, and it will create a smaller strain on the Ruthless Heavens.”

“Of course, that’s just the general theory. Another is that Titles are actually unrealized potential. There is only so much potential that the System can dig out from a person, so it can’t provide unlimited titles and need to set a limit,” Catheya added.

The two kept talking for almost an hour, where the two kept going tit-for-tat for information. She obviously didn’t know as much about the Dao or cultivation as Yrial, but she had the viewpoint of someone who was born in a top tier faction. That came with all kinds of snippets of information that accumulated into a huge advantage.

Catheya was more interested in his experiences, and kept asking about whether he had encountered any cursed Mystic Realms or performed rituals on battlefields. Zac realized she tried to understand why he “smelled” like a Draugr, but he kept that secret to himself as he extracted one piece of information after another.

For example, he learned that it was possible to control one's Dao to the point that you could actually form arrays with the mental energy before infusing it into skills. It would increase the boost even further, and sometimes even change the way a skill worked. He had never heard of anything of the sort before, which meant that it probably wasn't a widely known technique here. Of course, that wasn't something that was fated with Zac in any case.

However, the real shock was learning just what a [Divine Investiture Array] was, and he almost exploded in anger when doing so.

It was actually an array to create or alter Spirit Tools. It could either take raw materials or an already existing spirit tool, and it would create something new with it. It was extremely sought after as you could create a Spirit Tool with extreme growth potential that was uniquely suited to one's own battle style and Daos.

It was a very convenient item, and Catheya even went so far as to offer 250 billion Nexus Coins for it, but it didn't detract from the fact that the System had screwed him over yet again. How was an array like this supposed to 'rectify regret'? Had it straight out lied to him, or did it refer to the fact that [Verun's Bite] was starting to lag behind, which could be considered regretful?

"You don't understand how great such an array is. It can potentially create an item that will follow you for the rest of your life. An item you buy from a Blacksmith will always be influenced by the creator's Dao and path and limited by his lack of skill, creating frictions that become more obvious the further you progress," the Draugr explained with exasperation.

"The [Divine Investiture] array, on the other hand, can create an unblemished item that is a direct bridge between you and the Heavens," Catheya continued as she looked at Zac like he was an idiot. "Having a perfectly suited weapon is even more important than having a perfect cultivation manual, it's a top tier reward of the Tower. I would have tried tricking it out of your hands if you didn't have a karmic connection to my ancestor."

Zac slowly nodded in understanding, though there was still a sense of frustration about the situation. It sounded like something he could use though, and he contemplated upgrading Verun after returning to Earth. He had gathered quite a few materials during his climb, and he would be able to get some more in the Base Town.

He had the Pathfinder Eye and pieces of a true Dragon, along with metals, bones, and other odd materials that attracted the Tool Spirit's desire. It should allow him to elevate [Verun's Bite] to a terrifying level, which might be considered rectifying regret in some roundabout way.

Another valuable piece of intel appeared a few minutes later, when the Draugr asked where he had got his hands on a Sword Slave.

"A what?" Zac asked after hearing the unfamiliar term. "Do you mean one of the avatars I conjured? They were defensive treasures."

"No, I mean the old sword you used at the end," the Draugr snorted. "I am guessing you looted those defensive treasures from some poor girl during the Trial, judging by their design."

"Oh, that one. I picked it up during the Battle of Fates as well," Zac explained, not commenting on the fact that he was still wearing a bunch of jewelry.

He probably looked a bit weird, but he would be in a weakened state for a while longer, and there was no way he'd take off his defensive treasures in front of the Draugr.

"You should be careful about that item, and have whatever the human equivalent to a Cleansing Lich is take a look at you," Catheya said.

"Just what is it?" Zac asked with some worry, making a mental note to have Sui check up on his condition. "It feels a bit like a Spirit Tool, but it's still different."

"I guess you could call it a cursed object. A piece of a cultivator's soul has fused with that weapon, either through accident or through a ritual. The skill you used is most likely one the warrior knew before dying," Catheya explained. "Judging by its appearance its state is unstable, and it even tried to fuse with your arm."

"The man I took it from didn't seem to get any backlash from using it," Zac said, hoping the Draugr would have a solution.

The power of the attack he had unleashed was somewhere between the Second and Third swings of [Deforestation], and if he could use the weapon freely it would be a great ace to take out if needed. But his arm did feel a bit uncomfortable now that Catheya mentioned. He had just thought it was the general state of weakness from [Hatchetman's Rage], but perhaps there was something more.

"Then he must have had some means to counteract the side-effects of the weapon," Catheya guessed.

"So what's the point of having one of these Cursed Swords instead of a normal Spirit Tool?" Zac asked.

"There really isn't one, Spirit Tools are generally more convenient as the Tool Spirits are more compatible to reside in a weapon. It's either a sinister cultivator who makes them with mass sacrifices to suit their warped paths or as a punishment. Imagine, capturing the soul of your enemy and forcing it into an old rotten sword? It's pretty impactful," Catheya smiled. "Of course, I'd personally make them into my followers instead."

Zac shook his head with disgust before his thoughts went back to the youth back on the platform. Had he actually done something so cruel as to trap the souls of his enemies as punishment? It didn't fit with the image he righteous swordsman image he projected. But Zac was soon dragged out of his thoughts though as someone knocked at the door.

Varo slowly walked over and opened it up to show Galau standing outside.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Galau said as he repeatedly bowed toward Zac and Catheya. "Ms. Peak and her friend have waited to speak with you for some time now... I wonder if you might be available today?"

"Interesting fellow," Catheya muttered as she stood up. "We're done here in any case. Here, take this. I believe it might become useful to you someday. You need to upgrade your Nexus Hub quite a bit before using it though. You can contact me through the Fallen Ferrymen there."

It was another Teleportation Token, though it looked more refined compared to those had seen until now.

"Does this lead to the Undead Empire?" Zac asked as he looked at the Draugr askance.

"No," she snorted. "If you showed up at a teleportation array in the heartlands you would get snatched up and realigned in seconds. This token leads to Twilight Harbor, an interesting place in a frontier sector neighboring this one. That sector is even younger than Zecia, and things are very chaotic and exciting. You could call Twilight Harbor a 'Gray Zone', one of the few places where the living and dead intermingle."

"Didn't you say that wasn't allowed by the Empire?" Zac asked with a raised brow.

"It's not. But I never said that all undead are part of the Empire, did I?" the Draugr said with a smile as she left the room.